

A Challenge for Proponents of Female Subordination To Prove Their Case from The Bible

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Publisher: Church of God, Bismarck, Darwin & Laura Lee, **Editor:** Laura Lee, **Assistant Editor:** Darwin Lee We do not necessarily agree with all contributors, or their works submitted and printed in this newsletter. It is up to you to get out your Bible and see whether these things are true. Iron sharpens Iron

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1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

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*"Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me.
Place in my hands the wonderful Key
That shall unclasp and set me free."*
Clara H. Scott, Hymn

The purpose of this challenge is to prompt Christians to grapple with biblical facts rather than to accept traditional assumptions about female roles. What is at stake is not the role of women as much as the definition of the church as authentic biblical community. Is it possible for a local church to aspire to define itself as biblical community when more than half its constituency is excluded from participating in the most significant aspects of its life?

In the course of history, the church has often lost its way. For instance, during a thousand years, the church forgot something as crucial as the way of salvation and replaced it with methods of salvation by works that never worked. The biblical teaching was finally recovered by the Reformers just a few centuries ago.

Likewise, many present-day Christians believe that, along the way, the church has lost its own definition as community and replaced it with false definitions that reduce it to the status of institution, establishment, hierarchy, corporation, and programs. This challenge provides an incentive to help Christian's rediscover for themselves the biblical definition of the church as God's community of oneness.

To anyone who might be tempted to think that this challenge is a feminist plot to subvert the traditional church, it should be pointed out that feminism is a quest for equal rights and equal power. A basic premise of this presentation is the exact opposite, the belief that the Bible requires all Christians to pursue relationships of mutual submission and of reciprocal servanthood.

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An effective approach to tackle this challenge would be to go through this document one page at a time, to check the references with an open Bible at hand, and to search the Scriptures in order to supply the requested references.

Responses will be evaluated by a panel of three Professors Emeriti of the Department of Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College who, between them, represent more than a century of cumulative university-level Bible teaching.

Responses may be sent to the address below.

For a fuller treatment of the themes presented in this document consult the vast resources referenced in the catalog of CBE, online at www.cbeinternational.org, or contact CBE where copies of this document may be ordered: Christians for Biblical Equality, 122 West Franklin Avenue, Suite 218, Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451, (612) 872-6898 cbe@cbeinternational.org www.cbeinternational.org

1. The Challenge

Cite a text from the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 that enjoins or entitles men to exercise authority or leadership over women, or that designates men as "head" or "spiritual head" over women.

The Facts

There is not a hint, not even a whisper about anything like a hierarchical order existing between man and woman in the creation account of Genesis, chapters 1 and 2. In fact, the exact opposite is clearly taught in these two chapters. Both man and woman were made in God's image (1:26-27) and they both participated in God-assigned ministries without any role distinctions (1:28).

The creation order established oneness, not hierarchy (2:24). The first indication of a hierarchical order between man and woman resulted from the entrance of sin into the world (3:16). The subordination of women to men was not part of God's original design. It resulted from the violation of God's creation order.

The use of the word "helper" for the woman reinforces the relation of non-hierarchical complementarity that existed between the man and the woman prior to the fall (2:18). In the language of the Old Testament, a "helper" is one who rescues others in situations of need. This designation is often attributed to God as our rescuer. The word denotes not domesticity or subordination but competency and superior strength (Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:26, 29; Psalm 33:20, 70:5, etc.).

According to the text, the woman was instrumental in rescuing the man from being alone and, therefore, from not being yet the community of oneness that God had intended to create with both of them (Gen. 1:27.) As "helper," she pointedly enabled him to become with her the community that God had intended to establish through their union.

The word "helper" is used specifically in this context of God's deliberation to create community (2:18). The biblical text becomes violated when the word "helper" is wrenched away and lifted out of this specific context to be given other meanings that demean women by reducing them to the level of "complements" or docile conveniences created to improve the quality of male life.

In the account of the created order within which every relation of authority is carefully spelled out (1:26, 28; 2:17), there is not the slightest suggestion of a structure of authority existing between the man and the woman. Instead, the explicit evidence provided in those texts describes both as participating cooperatively in reflecting the image, and both fulfilling jointly the tasks of rulership and dominion without the necessity of a structure of hierarchy between them.

2. The Challenge

Cite a text from the Bible that assigns women subordinate status in relation to men because Adam was created before Eve.

The Facts

In the first chapter of Genesis, the sequence of creation moves, in increasing levels of sophistication, from material things to plants, to animals and, finally, to humans. According to chapter two, the process culminates with the creation of the woman. Obviously, chronological primacy was not intended to denote superior rank. No such lesson is drawn within those two chapters from the fact that the man was created before the woman.

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In 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, an argument is presented for women to wear a head covering during worship. It is based on the differences in status between men and women that derive from the fact that man was created first (v. 7-10).

But, according to the same text, all those considerations have been decisively swept aside "in the Lord," that is, in the Christian community (v. 11). In the new covenant, both men and women are in a relation of originative interdependence since men must recognize that they owe their existence to women just as the woman was made from man. Only the primacy of God as creator of all has significance since all things come from him, including both men and women (v. 11-12). As a result of this leveling of the ground "in the Lord", a covering is not even required of women since their hair is their covering (v. 15).

The ministry restrictions exceptionally placed on women in 1 Timothy, chapter 2 are not based on the creation order. They are drawn from the temptation account. No conclusion is made in the text from the fact that Adam was formed first except for the one lesson that Adam was not deceived but Eve was and she became the first transgressor (v. 13-14).

Adam had been instructed about the prohibition relative to the tree directly from God while Eve was not yet in existence. For this reason, of the two, she was the one less prepared to face the tempter. He was present during the temptation episode, but he remained silent (Gen. 3:6). Despite this disadvantage, she boldly engaged the tempter and she became deceived. This illustration from the Genesis temptation story has nothing to do with assigning all women of all times a subordinate status in church life. It was cited in this epistle to make the point that untaught and unqualified individuals should not aspire to teaching functions or to positions of leadership. They should first become quiet learners (1 Tim. 2: 11-12).

3. The Challenge

Cite a text from the Bible that defines the headship of Christ to the church as a relation of authority or of leadership.

The Facts

The New Testament defines the headship ministry of Christ to the church as a servant relation designed to provide the church with life and growth. This headship is never presented as an authority or lordship position.

Eph. 1:22-23. Christ is supremely and universally sovereign, but as head for the church, it is not said that he rules over it. Instead, he provides his body with the fullness of him who fills all in all. He causes the church to grow and flourish.

Eph. 4:15-16. Christ as head provides the body with oneness, cohesion, and growth. This is a servant-provider role, not one of rulership.

Eph. 5:23. Christ is head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. His headship to the church is defined as saviorhood which is biblically defined as a servant, self-sacrificing function, not a lordship role.

Col. 1:18. Christ is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead. As its head, Christ is the source of the church's life.

Col. 2:19. Christ is the head from whom the whole body grows because it is nourished by him. He is servant-provider of life and growth to the church.

Obviously, Christ is Lord of all and therefore Lord of the church. But never does the New Testament define Christ's relation to the church as its head in terms of lordship, authority, or rulership. As head to the church, Christ is always the servant who gives the church all she needs to become his radiant Bride. So is the husband to his wife (Eph. 5:25-30), within a relationship of mutual submission (v. 21).

The word "head" used figuratively in the English language refers to boss, person in authority, leader. It never has that meaning in New Testament Greek. There are hundreds of references in the New Testament to religious, governmental, civic, familial and military authority figures. Not one of them is ever designated as "head."

Even Christ, as "head" of all rule and authority, remains their original giver of life and fullness (Col. 2:10; 1:16). Similarly, Christ was never called "head" of the church until after his crucifixion, the supreme expression of his servant ministry as

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the giver of new life.

Whenever Christ is described as "head" to the church, his ministry is that of servant-provider. Similarly, as head to his wife, a husband is a servant-provider of life, of fullness and growth, not one who exercises authority over her.

4. The Challenge

Cite a text from the Bible that makes men head over women, or a husband head over his wife.

The Facts

There is no such statement in the Bible. The text in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is often cited as establishing a top-down hierarchy:

God over Christ--- Christ over man--- man over woman.

However, this biblical text must be radically dismembered, and its components reshuffled in order to produce such results. The untouched biblical sequence is totally different, and it does not present a hierarchical structure: Christ, head of man--- man, head of woman--- God, head of Christ.

The teaching in this text concerns the concept of "head" as giver of life. In creation, Christ (as the Word, John 1:3) gave life to man; man to woman (as she was taken from him, Gen. 2:21-23); and in the incarnation, God gave life to Christ (Luke 1:35). This understanding of "head" as "provider of life" is consistent with the immediate context which deals with the significance of origination (1 Cor. 11:7-12).

The meaning of "head" as servant-provider of life in this text is also consistent with the headship passage in Ephesians 5:21-33. There, the church is described as being subject to Christ in the reciprocity of servanthood because Christ as head is also servant to the church as its Savior and as the source of its welfare. Saviorhood in the New Testament is not a lordship role but one of self-sacrifice in radical servanthood.

Likewise, the wife is servant to her husband as she submits to him because the husband is servant to her in radical headship as he gives himself up for her as Christ did for the church (v. 25-30).

Both the general concept of headship in the New Testament and this passage of Scripture are infused with the notions of mutual submission (v. 21) and, therefore, of reciprocal servanthood. Such biblical teachings reduce the imposition of hierarchical relations between husbands and wives to irrelevance, if not to abuse in their relationship.

5. The Challenge

Cite a New Testament text according to which men are given unilateral authority over women or are permitted to act as their leaders.

The Facts

Once the fall shattered the God-given oneness between man and woman, they both faced a dysfunctional relationship. The woman was warned that, because of the disruption of the fall, the husband would rule over her (Gen. 3:16). Oneness would turn into abuse. But no mandate was ever given to the man to claim this rulership over the woman.

There is no allowance made in the New Testament or license given for any one believer to wield authority over another adult believer. The pledge exacted from brides in an older wedding ceremony, "Wilt thou obey him...?" had no biblical warrant.

There is no text in Scripture that enjoins wives to obey their husbands. The call is for mutual subjection (Eph. 5:21). Both wives and husbands must relate to each other "in the same way" as slaves submit to their masters (1 Peter 2:18; 3:1, 7 NIV) in order to follow in the steps of Christ, their supreme example (2:21).

The New Testament singularly cites the case of Sarah who obeyed her husband Abraham (1 Peter 3:6). Sarah's case was cited in full knowledge of the fact that Abraham pointedly obeyed his wife just as often as she obeyed him, once even under God's specific command (Gen. 16:2, 6; 21:11-12).

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Christians are solemnly forbidden by their Lord to establish among themselves structures of authority similar to the hierarchical systems that prevail in secular society. Those who aspire to attain such positions of leadership must, instead, become servants and slaves of those over whom they wish to wield authority (Matt. 20:25-28).

Leadership is always defined in the New Testament as shared leadership. In church life, leadership is a team function entrusted to a plurality of persons such as elders. These act as servants who have recourse to the exercise of authority only exceptionally when required to do so because of disciplinary or crisis situations and then, only corporately.

In marriage, husbands and wives are bonded in a relationship of non-hierarchical complementarity within which each partner brings to the union his or her leadership gifts in a structure of shared leadership. (For resolving biblical situations of decisional impasses, see Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, pp. 212-214).

6. The Challenge

Cite a New Testament text that exempts husbands from being mutually submitted to their wives.

The Facts

Male rulership has prevailed since the time of the fall. For Christians, the new covenant in Christ should reverse this situation to the original goodness of the created order, from rulership back to the reciprocity of oneness (Matt. 19:4-5).

Submission to Christ requires of believers that they submit to one another (Eph. 5:21). According to this text, where there is no mutual submission, reverence for Christ is wanting. Because the newness of the Gospel calls for new relationships, a paradigm shift has occurred that requires of Christians, including husbands and wives, to be in mutual subjection.

Since the practical expression of subjection is servanthood, this means that both husbands and wives are servants to each other. But perhaps in order to overcome the ruler legacy that men have inherited from the fall, it is additionally specified that Christian men must also love their wives to the point of Christ-like self-sacrifice for their sakes (v. 25-30).

For this precise reason, in the only New Testament text where the word "authority" is used (in verb form) to describe husband and wife relations, husbands are not exempt from coming under the authority of their wives. A Christian wife has exactly the same authority rights over her husband as a husband has over his wife (1 Cor. 7:4).

In this text, the Scriptures teach specifically that a husband has no authority over his own body but that his wife does. (Interestingly, the NIV has considerably softened its translation of this challenging statement). In fact, decisions that affect their marital relationship may not be made unilaterally by either husband or wife (v. 5). They require the agreement of both parties. They both have equal say in the matter since either of the two may veto the proposed course of action.

Thus, the New Testament requires that, beginning with the most personal expression of conjugal life, the one that emblemizes par excellence the union of man and woman, relationships be controlled jointly and that decisions be made by consensus with the involvement of both partners on a basis of equality. This call to mutual subjection and to joint participation in the exercise of authority strikes at the very foundation of any authority claim of husbands over wives.

7. The Challenge

Cite a biblical text according to which men are favored over women in the distribution of spiritual gifts, including those that qualify believers for ministries of leadership.

The Facts

In the garden, Adam and Eve were jointly entrusted with the dual responsibility of populating the earth and managing the environment (Gen. 1:28). The two mandates were committed to both of them without any role differentiations on the basis of gender. In order to fulfill this command, the man and the woman must have brought their best abilities to the accomplishment of both tasks in a relationship of equal partnership, best defined as non-hierarchical complementarity.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter gave the inaugural speech that marked the beginning of the life of the church universal. The very first statement he made concerned the consequences of the new availability of the Holy Spirit to all

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believers. The outpouring of the Spirit promoted both men and women without differentiation to the ministry of prophecy (Acts 2:16-18), a function that was regarded as one of the highest ministries in the life of the church (1 Cor. 12:28).

Consistently, the New Testament declares that all the members of local churches are endowed with spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-12) without any mention of women being excluded from such ministry roles. Furthermore, the text teaches that no individual has the right to excuse oneself (v. 14-16) and that no one has the right to exclude someone else from doing ministry (v. 20-22).

On such premises, all may prophesy (14:31), and both men and women may lead in worship through prayer and the spoken word (11:4-5) such as the four women who prophesied in the church of Caesarea (Acts 21:9).

In this light, it is evident that the statement in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 forbidding women to speak in church has nothing to do with women exercising their spiritual gifts. In this passage, the Apostle was dealing with a different issue that did not concern the exercise of spiritual gifts. He was actually opposing, by quoting their words derisively, abusive church leaders who were intent on excluding women from active participation in the life of the church. (For a commentary on this passage, see Bilezikian, Community 101, pp. 86-89.)

8. The Challenge

Cite a biblical text that exclusively disqualifies women from exercising church leadership ministries.

The Facts

The one passage that is ultimately adduced to claim that the New Testament prohibits women to teach or to have authority over men is found in 1 Timothy 2:11-15. However, the same section of Scriptures imposes similarly restrictive leadership and ministry prohibitions on men. According to it, a man's family status provides the indispensable credential for his ability to lead the church (3:4-5, 12). The only men who may aspire to positions of church leadership, which include the ministries of teaching and managing the affairs of the church, must be married ("husbands of one wife"), and have children who are submissive and respectful, and who are believers (Titus 1:6). According to this text, ability to manage family provides indispensable proof of ability to manage the local church.

Such requirements disqualify from service not only women, but also all men who are single; all men married but childless; all men married but who have only one child; all men married but who have children too young to profess faith; all men married but who have one unbelieving child or children; all men married and whose children are believers but not submissive; all men married and whose children are believers and submissive but not respectful.

These exceptionally harsh and restrictive requirements are all the more amazing since the New Testament favors singleness for both men and women as preferred status to do ministry (Matt. 19:11-12, 1 Cor. 7:25-35), and since the New Testament emphatically requires the total utilization of all available spiritual gifts in the ministries of the church, regardless of marital status or gender.

Of course, the Scriptures provide an explanation for those apparent contradictions. The singularly restrictive structure of ministry prescribed in 1 Timothy and Titus was established as a remedial measure for churches that had fallen into a state of terminal crisis. Its underlying principle of restricting ministry in sick or immature churches to few leaders of proven managerial competency is relevant today to churches that find themselves in similarly extreme situations. However, the prevailing New Testament model of full participation of the total constituency in the ministries of the local church applies to healthy churches (See Bilezikian, Community 101, pp. 82-128).

It should be sternly noted that, for the sake of biblical consistency and integrity of practice, churches that insist on keeping women out of ministries of leadership on the basis of the prohibitions of 1 Timothy 2, thereby make themselves accountable to keep also men out of the very same positions on the basis of the similarly restrictive provisions stipulated in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and listed above.

9. The Challenge

Cite a biblical text that prohibits the ordination of women to church ministry positions.

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The Facts

The evidence indicates that women were entrusted with the ministry of the Word in New Testament churches. There were female prophets (Acts 2:17-19; 21:9), female teachers (Acts 18:26; Titus 2:3), female church leaders (Rom. 16:1, 3-5; Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:15), and even a female apostle by the name of Junia (Rom. 16:7).

There is no text in the Bible forbidding women to be ordained because, according to the New Testament, all believers without exception are ordained by God to do ministry on the basis of their spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11; 14:31; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11, 1 Peter 4:10-11). In fact, those very ministries that are traditionally viewed as requiring "ordination" carry only a supportive role according to the New Testament (Eph. 4:11) while the executive part of the ministry, the works of service that build up the body of Christ, belongs to the "non-ordained" people of the congregation (v. 12).

The practice of ordaining select people to hold positions of authority in churches should be viewed as an ecclesiastical tradition rather than as a biblical prescription. Thus, Paul and Barnabas were already among the recognized prophets and teachers of the church in Antioch when they received the laying on of hands, not to make them prophets or teachers but to commission them for a short-term sub-ministry (Acts 13: 1-3). It was their recognized spiritual gifts as prophet/teacher that had validated their ministry, not the subsequent laying on of hands.

This New Testament practice of the laying on of hands can hardly be associated with the current practice of ordination since Timothy received it twice, once at the hand of elders (1 Tim. 4:14), then from Paul himself (2 Tim. 1:6). In both cases, the purpose was the impartation of a spiritual gift, not the recognition of the ministry deriving from it as is the case with ordination as currently practiced (see Bilezikian, Community 101, pp. 155-161).

Since the institution of ordination is traditional rather than biblically prescribed, there can be no valid objection raised on scriptural grounds to women being ordained. According to the New Testament, all believers, without exception, are ordained by God to do ministry on the basis of their spiritual gifts.

10. The Challenge

Cite a biblical text according to which the differences between manhood and womanhood warrant hierarchical relations between Christian men and women.

The Facts

The organization of the Christian community is never described as a gender-based hierarchy in the Scriptures. To the contrary, it is the doctrine of the community of oneness that sets the norm (Matt. 19:4-6; John 17:11, 20-23; Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Eph. 4:4-6; etc.).

The practical implementation of this oneness is summarized in Galatians 3:28: racial distinctions (Jew/Greek), class distinctions (slave/free), and the gender distinction (male/female) are declared to have become irrelevant to the functioning of Christian communities. The compelling mandate for this radical restructuring of community is given as: "for you are all one in Christ."

Proponents of female subordination often insist that this oneness, which transcends race, class, and gender differences, is limited to the inclusion of new believers in the community through justification and baptism (Gal. 3:24-27, 28; 1 Cor. 12:13). However, Scripture prohibits limiting the principle of non-discrimination taught throughout the New Testament merely to entrance of converts into the community.

The New Testament emphatically declares that the same oneness, which transcends differences of race, class, and gender as a condition for entering the church, is also the driving force that energizes the constituency of the local church into the performance of its ministries. This oneness pertains to the functional life of the body (Rom. 12:4-5). The same oneness sustains the corporate use of all the spiritual gifts invested in it by the Spirit for the performance of the ministries of the local body (1 Cor. 12:11-12; Eph. 4:4-8, 11).

Oneness is always defined in the New Testament as the basis for participation of all in the ministries of the local church. Oneness and ministry are inseparably linked in the biblical text. Therefore, the declaration according to which there is no male or female because we are all one in Christ is a ringing mandate for all to participate in church ministry

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functions without raising the gender difference as grounds for discrimination.

The Scripture absolutely forbids racial, class and gender discrimination by reason of the oneness of the church as a body. This oneness is consistently defined in the New Testament as full participation of the total constituency in the ministries of the church. This and other teachings of Scripture rule out gender-based hierarchy as a structure for biblical oneness.

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Strive Not About Words

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Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. (KJV, [2 Timothy 2:14](#))

I’ve often heard this text used to discourage detailed debate about the meaning of Scripture passages, or even to devalue highly precise Bible study. Is this what Paul’s warning to Timothy here is about?

First, observe that whatever “striving about words” is, Paul clearly saw it as something that threatened Timothy’s ministry. Timothy is to “charge them before the Lord” not to do this. Second, the activity is doubly discouraged as lacking in value (“no profit”) and also as causing damage of some kind to hearers (“subverting”). Third, the activity apparently involved individuals in at least two roles: the “strivers” and the “hearers.”

So what activity is being forbidden here? What is meant by “strive not about words”?

For the most part, writers do not see Paul’s warning here as broadly rejecting painstaking word-analysis and debating of

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details. Some come close, though.

John Chrysostom, the fourth century preacher and bishop in Constantinople, had this to say:

But why does he admonish them not to strive about words? He knows that it is a dainty thing, and that the human soul is ever prone to contend and to dispute about words. To guard against this, he has not only charged them “not to strive about words,” but to render his discourse more alarming, he adds, “to the subverting of the hearers.” (“Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy,” trans. James Tweed and Philip Schaff. Christian Literature Company, 1889. 493)

Matthew Henry has a similar focus.

Those that are disposed to strive commonly strive about matters of very small moment. Strifes of words are very destructive to the things of God. That they strive not about words **to no profit**. If people did but consider of what little use most of the controversies in religion are, they would not be so zealous in their strifes of words, **to the subverting of the hearers**, to the drawing of them away from the great things of God, and occasioning unchristian heats and animosities, by which truth is often in danger of being lost. (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume. Hendrickson, 1994. 2362)

In our own day, the passage is often taken as a warning against “hair-splitting.”

The warning against disputing about mere words, and wasting time in hair-splitting arguments, is repeated in verse 16 where Paul describes it as ‘godless chatter’. He clearly had in mind certain people in Ephesus who liked to play with religious ideas and words in the way that a small boy plays a game of marbles. They speculated about God and wove high-sounding theories about Christianity until they reduced it to some kind of meaningless and vague philosophy.

We still have to contend with a similar kind of thing today; you can meet such people in the church. They spend a lot of time talking and arguing about the Christian faith instead of living it. They are not really soul-searching for the truth, but are toying with the gospel, speculating about marginal issues which do not help themselves or others to grow in faith. (Peter Williams, Opening Up 2 Timothy. Opening Up Commentary, 2007. 55-56)

Many interpreters see the passage as mainly addressing a problem of emphasis, motive, character, or all of these. Williams, above, though he alludes to excessive attention to detail, sees the strivers-about-words as being men with a heart problem. They were not seriously interested in truth but debated the meaning of texts as a kind of game. Williams also sees a disjunction between arguing and living. The strivers about words were, in his view, *substituting* analysis for actually following Christ.

Lea and Griffin offer a similar perspective, combining the idea of excessive attention to detail with (quoting Ward) prideful motives.

This wrong emphasis can lead to aimless word splitting. “In the end disputing about words seeks not the victory of truth but the victory of the speaker” [R. W. Ward]. This word splitting involved useless verbal quibbling, but it did not focus on the aims of Christianity. (Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus. The New American Commentary, 1992. 214)

Returning an older tradition, John Calvin has a similar perspective, taking these strivers as men inclined to put on a show.

Solemnly charging them before the Lord, not to dispute about words. Logomachein means to engage earnestly in contentious disputes, which are commonly produced by a foolish desire of being ingenious. Solemn charging before the Lord is intended to strike terror; [172] and from this severity we learn how dangerous to the Church is that knowledge which leads to debates, that is, which disregards piety, and tends to ostentation. (http://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/2_timothy/2.htm)

Which words?

John Gill looked at the passage a bit differently. The 18th century Baptist pastor viewed the warning more in terms of a contrast between the right “words” and the wrong ones.

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[I]t became them to strive and contend for the form of sound words, for the wholesome words or doctrines of our Lord Jesus, but not about mere words, and especially such as were *to no profit* to no advantage to truth, nor to themselves nor others; were not to edification, to spiritual edification, to godly edifying, which is in faith. (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bibl...>)

For Gill the warning is not primarily about the degree of attention to detail or the degree of argumentative passion, nor even mainly the motivations or goals of the striver (though that is assumed). Rather, Paul’s intent is to contrast false teachers with true and to call Timothy’s trainees to strive about *God’s* words rather than merely human words.

Several features of the immediate and larger context encourage us toward this understanding of the passage.

1. Paul frequently calls upon Timothy to engage in behavior many would consider to be “contentious” ([1 Tim. 6:12](#), [2 Tim. 4:2](#), [Titus 1:9](#), [Titus 1:13](#), [Titus 2:15](#)).
2. Paul repeatedly reminds Timothy of the importance of “words” ([1 Tim. 4:6, 6:3](#); [2 Tim. 1:13](#). [Titus 1:9](#) is also noteworthy).
3. Though Paul warns, “strive not about words” in [2 Timothy 2:14](#), he emphasizes diligence and precision in handling the word in 2:15.
4. In the context, Paul is indeed contrasting the work of false teachers with true teachers. The approved worker of 2:15 is in contrast with those who “concerning the truth have erred” in 2:16-18.
5. The two statements following “strive not about words” (“to no profit ... to the subverting”) express results but may well be intended to help us understand what *kind* of striving about words is in view: the kind that does not profit but rather “ruins” (*katastrophe*) hearers (as Gill interprets, above).
6. The fact that there are “hearers” suggests that Paul has some kind of teaching in view, not debating among students regarding the meaning of texts.
7. “Strive ... about words” translates a single Greek word that appears only in this verse in the NT. It may well mean “to quarrel with [i.e., using] words.” Philip Towner sums it up well.

False teachers are destructive. As this passage shows, this applies to their methods, their doctrine and the results they cause in the church. With regard to method, they are argumentative. Throughout these letters, it is this trait that most typifies the activities of the false teachers ([1 Tim 6:4](#); [Tit 3:9](#)). In fact, the translation quarreling about words (v. 14) expresses one side of a single Greek word that can also mean “fighting with words.” The one term sums up their activity as a whole, content and method. (1–2 Timothy & Titus. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, 1994)

Conclusion

Paul’s point in this passage is clearly not “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” The warning does not devalue precision in study, heated debate, or the unpleasantness of confrontation. It is not clear that the “words” of the strivers he has in mind are the words of Scripture at all. Rather, the passage calls us to diligence in rightly understanding words—the ones God has given us.

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Have a Great Passover!

Death by Debt

(Copyright 2024) by Joseph B. Baity (Charlotte, North Carolina)



On December 29, 2023, the U.S. government’s “total public debt outstanding” (the national debt) surpassed the \$34 trillion mark for the first time, according to a report released by the Treasury Department on January 2, the first business day of 2024. This enormous figure represents the total amount borrowed by the federal government that remains outstanding or unpaid over the entire history of the U.S.

Each year that the government spends more money than it brings in via tax revenues, otherwise called “deficit spending,” it must borrow more money—typically in the form of bond sales—to make up the difference, and the national debt grows. And just like any financed debt, interest accumulates, substantially adding to America’s burdensome bill.

Historically, presidents have taken the blame for inflating—or credit for reducing—the national debt, and the Executive Office significantly influences the same. Still, the actual power of the U.S. purse is firmly in the hands of Congress, which must approve all federal government spending.

America has possessed a national debt since before its first national election. George Washington’s administration inherited a debt of just over \$71 million, which fluctuated until Andrew Jackson nearly eliminated it during his eight years in office. Jackson inherited a \$58 million debt, bringing it down by over 99 percent to just under \$337,000 when he left office in 1837.

The national debt has been on the rise ever since, crossing the billion-dollar mark during the Lincoln presidency and passing the trillion-dollar threshold under Ronald Reagan. The last president to witness a debt decrease was Calvin Coolidge, who left office in 1929, just before the country plunged into the Great Depression.

The greatest dollar-amount-increase occurred during the eight years of the Obama administration, with over \$8 trillion

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added, while Donald Trump presided over nearly the same increase in only four years. Under Joe Biden, the administration has seen an almost \$5.5 trillion increase in its first three years. Still, there are no signs of slowing the spending that necessitates more borrowing as the country struggles to avoid another severe recession or worse.

So, how did we get here?

Until 1971, the U.S. government—by design—was constrained to borrow and spend based mainly on the amount of gold it kept in reserve. Though the Congressional and Executive branches constantly pushed the envelope to spend more, the “gold standard” imposed a definite fiscal discipline to which the government had to adhere to prevent economic and political catastrophe. The money supply could only grow per the value of U.S.-held gold.

However, in August 1971, with the economy reeling from rampant spending on new “Great Society” social programs and the Vietnam War, President Nixon unpegged the U.S. dollar (USD) from the gold standard, preventing foreign banks from exchanging the dollars they held (from purchasing U.S. bonds) for gold in the U.S. reserve. With the dollar severed from gold, the USD was now a “fiat currency,” meaning the Federal Reserve’s central bank could print or issue as many dollars as the government needed to fund its endless expansion, selling debt to foreign banks based solely on the “full faith and credit of the United States government,” with no need to redeem any of its gold reserves.

Nixon announced his new monetary policy as temporary. Still, it was soon clear there would be no going back to the gold standard since Congress could promise endlessly and spend virtually as much money as it desired. The national debt has been spiraling out of control ever since, gaining a frightening momentum since the War on Terror following 9/11, the great recession of 2008-2009, the green transition from fossil fuels, and the ruinous damage wreaked by the foolish governmental response to [COVID-19](#).

Although conservative economists have long predicted a catastrophic collapse of the USD (and the economy it undergirds), America has so far avoided such a catastrophe. However, as the debt balloons and interest rates rise to fight the inflation caused by issuing too much money—incurring too much debt—interest payments alone are now costing the government about \$2 billion a day. Absent drastic fiscal restraint, these interest payments will soon surpass the monies spent each year on defense.

With the cost of credit rising, American business is suffering. From Ellen Schneider’s article, “[Private US Companies Increasingly Going Bust as Profit Shrinks](#),” published by Bloomberg News on January 8, “Private U.S. companies are seeing their earnings and profit margins collapse after the Federal Reserve’s rate hikes have lifted financing costs, and are increasingly going broke, according to a new report.”

Major corporations like Amazon, Citigroup, Blackrock, Google, and hundreds more began laying off workers in 2023 while announcing even deeper cuts in 2024. In the meantime, bankruptcies for small- to medium-sized businesses (and individuals) continue to rise. According to an article, “[US bankruptcies surged 18% in 2023 and seen rising again in 2024—report](#),” published on January 3 by Reuters: “Total bankruptcy filings—encompassing commercial and personal insolvencies—rose to 445,186 last year from 378,390 in 2022, according to data from bankruptcy data provider Epiq AACER.”

In the same article, Michael Hunter, vice president of Epiq AACER, added:

We expect the increase in [the] number of consumer and commercial filers seeking bankruptcy protection to continue in 2024 given the runoff of pandemic stimulus, increased cost of funds, higher interest rates, rising delinquency rates, and near historic levels of household debt.

Quoting from “[US national debt hits record \\$34 trillion as Congress gears up for funding fight](#),” written by Fatima Hussein and Josh Boak and published by the Associated Press on January 2:

“So far, Washington has been spending money as if we had unlimited resources,” said Sung Won Sohn, an economics professor at Loyola Marymount University. “But the bottom line is there is no free lunch,” he said, “and I think the outlook is pretty grim.” . . .

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“Looking ahead, debt will continue to skyrocket as the Treasury expects to borrow nearly \$1 trillion more by the end of March,” said Peterson Foundation CEO Michael Peterson. “Adding trillion after trillion in debt, year after year, should be a flashing red warning sign to any policymaker who cares about the future of our country.” . . .

When it could turn into a more dire situation is anyone’s guess, says Shai Akabas, director of economic policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, “but if and when that happens, it could mean very significant consequences that occur very quickly.”

Once upon a time, America’s economic infrastructure was the world’s envy, and her vast riches blessed all nations. And while the modern American ethic detaches itself from Christian precepts, the nation’s origins reflected a strong reverence for God and the bounties received as a result of His gracious blessings for Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-7; 22:17-18).

Sadly, American leaders and citizens continue to turn steadily away from their Creator and find themselves drowning in a deluge of red ink and standing on the brink of unprecedented economic disaster. While no one can predict the exact timing, without repentance and immediate fiscal restraint, America’s death by debt approaches. The once proud leader of the world may soon succumb to those who hold the bill (Proverbs 22:7).

See Joseph B. Baity’s other articles at:

Baity, Joseph B. – Church of God, Bismarck (church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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Free!

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Do you know what it’s like to live 45 years of your life all scrunched up in a box? That’s the best way I can describe it—having my hopes, dreams, emotions, opinions, and the essence of me stuffed down inside a tightly sealed container that was controlled by someone on the outside.

Life didn’t start out that way. Like every other child born into this world, I was full of life, energetic, and passionate about living. I clearly communicated my needs and opened up my heart to give and receive love. For a while, innocence and naiveté sheltered me from reality, but it didn’t take long for negative messages to embed themselves into my mind and

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eventually imprison my soul.

“I can’t believe you’re so clumsy.”

“Don’t be bragging about that—people will think you’ve got the big head.”

“You just need to keep your mouth shut and not rock the boat.”

“Wives are not supposed to question their husbands—just be submissive, have a quiet spirit, and let him think he’s the boss.”

“I wouldn’t try that if I were you—you might embarrass yourself if you fail.”

“I don’t think you should say that—what would people think?”

“Good Christian girls don’t dance!”

Christianity was defined by what you didn’t do (I’m a Christian—I don’t dance!) rather than pursuing God as your greatest treasure.

In the 50s parents were taught not to hold their children too much for fear of spoiling them. They were careful not to affirm their children’s accomplishments or encourage them too much so they wouldn’t become prideful or “haughty.”

I grew up in a loving family, and never doubted my parents’ love, but I developed a spirit of timidity and fear, was easily intimidated, and derived my identity and self-image from other people’s perceptions of me. I was easy prey to a controlling, angry husband who repeated the pattern of verbal abuse and violence he learned from his family of origin.

It was the endless flow of vicious messages that finally closed my spirit and sealed the container.

“You’re dull and boring. I don’t know why anyone would want to be around you.”

“You smile too much. You breathe too loud.”

“Can’t you do anything right? Women at church are talking to me about you. They’re concerned . . .”

“You’re evil. If you were a good mother (or wife) you would . . .”

“When you lost all that weight, you were just beginning to look good. Now . . .”

I had imagined my life so much differently. But here I was, a grown woman, hiding my heart from those who might hurt me, stuffing my emotions deep within to avoid further pain, learning to devalue my instincts, and lacking courage to take a stand against what I knew was evil.

Life is not good living scrunched up in a can. There’s no freedom to think, trust, love, or be creative. The air is stale, and the darkness is oppressive. The only thing you can do is exist and long for someone to come along, pry open the lid and help you escape.

Do you know what happens when someone releases you from 45 years of pressurized living in a can? Think of a jack-in-the-box or a trick can of fabric snakes locked in a can, awaiting someone to turn the crank or take off the cap and set you FREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!

That’s exactly what happened to me eight years ago when God sprung me from my prison of self-protection and self-pity to a party in my honor where this jailbird heard the Trinity singing a song about me. I couldn’t believe it when I heard the Father’s welcome song, *“Dear beautiful daughter, I love you! I’ve been waiting to spend some time with you so I can tell you just how much I adore you.”*

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Then Jesus, the Son, sang the most beautiful lyrics of forgiveness— *“I’m so glad you came to the party even though you’re a bit bruised and tattered. I have made all the necessary arrangements for a complete makeover, and everything is paid for in full. You will have a fresh start with full access to the Father as we prepare the wedding party to receive you as my bride.”*

That’s when the Spirit began to sing a song with the most inviting rhythm:

*“You were created
in the Father’s image
It’s time for you
to release your fears
and dance!*

*I will teach you,
and give you direction,
fill you with conviction
and pour His passion
into your soul.”*

I’ve been dancing ever since with great passion as God launched me into a ministry to help other women who are locked up in the same joint in which I was incarcerated.

Now God is teaching me the slow dance (or the “smoochie” as my friend Steve from England calls it) so I will stay in step with Him as He leads me, cheek to cheek, across the dance floor of life.

I’m looking forward to dancing with Him in eternity as my bridegroom at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. (Rev. 19:7-9)

This marriage will last . . . forever!

See Brenda Bransons other articles at:

[Branson, Brenda – Church of God, Bismarck \(church-of-god-bismarck.org\)](http://church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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Pearls before Swine Parable

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Why did Jesus tell us not to cast our pearls before swine? When did he give this parable and what does it mean?

The parable of the pearls before swine was given by Jesus a short time before the Passover season of 28 A.D. It was offered as part of his extensive Sermon on the Mount message given to both his disciples and to the public interested in his teachings.

Interestingly, although somewhat rare and usually sought after, the KJV bible mentions pearls in only eight places. Four of these locations are in the book of Revelation. The verse you are referring to is in Matthew 7. This verse records Jesus stating a parable that we are not to offer holy things to dogs, and we are not to cast our pearls before swine. Why is this the case? It is because such animals might walk over them and then afterwards come and attack us!

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Jesus stated, "Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn around and tear you in pieces" (Matthew 7:6, HBFV).

Symbolism

The word "pearls" in Matthew 7 is symbolic of godly wisdom and the salvation brought by his kingdom. God's wisdom is likened to something of a very great price in another reference in Matthew (see Matthew 13:45 - 46). All this is discussing God's kingdom and the wisdom one must acquire in order to enter it (Job 28:12 - 20).

Wisdom is found using the Holy Spirit, which is only given to those who obey him (Acts 5:32). How can, however, understanding and knowledge lead us to our own pearls of great price (Matthew 13:45 - 46)? How can they bring us to the pure truth of God? It is only through recognizing and obeying his laws and his ways (Psalm 119:104).

God's precepts are written in the Scriptures. If one has his Spirit, one can study his Word (His Precepts) for Holy knowledge, and upon this foundation the Eternal will then grant Holy understanding.

Wisdom like Pearls

If we take our wisdom (like precious pearls) and throw it all around without knowing whether it might fall before dogs (an impure or self-righteous heart) or swine (someone who is considered unclean), Jesus warns us that they will likely tear us to pieces. This means they will twist and distort what is said and then come after us!

God tells us in the book of Proverbs that there are times when we should be silent (not casting our pearls before others) and times when we should respond directly (especially about what is the truth). Jesus sometimes answered the questions and accusations thrown his way by the religious leaders of his day (e.g. Matthew 12:1 - 8) and sometimes he refused to respond to their inquiries (e.g. Matthew 21:23 - 27).

We must discern the reason for any questions according to the person who is doing the asking and answer within that context.

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, so that he may not be wise in his own conceit (Proverbs 26:4 - 5, HBFV).

We should not cast our pearls of Godly wisdom before "swine," meaning someone who is a militant, ready to fight, unbeliever lest they turn on us and insult us or do us harm.

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[BibleStudy.org](https://www.biblestudy.org) – [Church of God, Bismarck \(church-of-god-bismarck.org\)](https://www.church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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Letters

Letter from Giorgio (April 1, 2024)

I'm looking for a congregation.

Good morning, I am a baptized Christian, I saw your website and I believe that we share the same doctrines, I live in Italy and I wanted to ask if you have a congregation in my country. Thank you.

Response: We are primarily a newsletter. So, no we don't have any congregations in Italy, but we will send you our newsletter and you can use that as a study guide. Laura Lee

Announcements

Announcement from William P. Goff (March 30, 2024)

Greetings Brethren, and happy Sabbath.

The March 30, 2024, Kenya Update is now posted at:

<http://www.khofh.org>

Thank You.
Bill Goff

Ads

Ad from Gary C. Miller (March 31, 2024)

PASSOVER 2024

Recommended reading prior to Passover Services:

"Is Passover the First Day of Unleavened Bread"

"Yahshua Was Crucified Wednesday, Abib 15, 31 A.D."

These are available on our website to download in pdf format (www.icyahweh.org) or by postal to correct mailing address.

NOTE: In preparing for these days yeast and foods made with yeast must be removed from our dwelling prior to Passover service April 22. Foods containing autolyzed yeast or yeast extract do not have to be removed. Wine does not have to be removed.

Below is the 2024 schedule for ICY Passover Services April 22 and 23.

PLACE: Southern Care & Comfort Event Center (116 N Broadway, Poplar Bluff, MO)

PASSOVER: APRIL 22, 2024

Passover Sabbath, Monday, April 22, 2024; day begins in Poplar Bluff, MO at 5:36 am, and ends 9:03 pm.

PASSOVER SABBATH AFTERNOON SERVICES: 1:30 pm----Set up room

2:00 pm----Worship service sermon followed by snacks, finger foods (**provided**).

The main meal will be Passover evening (Jn. 13:2,4).

PASSOVER EVENING SERVICES:

Sunset: 7:42 pm

Night Begins: 9:03 pm

Must Eat Unleavened Bread in the Evening: Between Sunset and Night (Ex.12:18) 7:42 pm-----Begin Evening

Passover Meal (**potluck**)

9:10 pm-----Passover service begins during meal.

THE PROCEDURE: Scripture Reading, Foot-Washing followed by Eating Blessed Unleavened Bread and drinking Blessed Wine. End with a Song and Dismissal.

APRIL 23, 2024:

9:00 am-----Men's Meeting in SC & C Event Center Room. Men's offerings (Deut. 16:16)

Holy Days 2024

Passover – April 23, 2024 (Observed at Sunset the Evening Before)

Passover/Unleavened Bread – April 23-29, 2024

Pentecost – June 12, 2024

Trumpets - October 3, 2024

Atonement – October 12, 2024

Tabernacles –October 17, 2024, to October 23, 2024

Last Great Day – October 24, 2024

Notes

Notes